Native American Experience in Post-Civil War

Progressive Reformers, Social Issues, Acts and Congress

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In the post American Civil War Era, the Americans experienced many changes, such as social democracy, rise in movements demanding reforms for women, social reforms etc. A widely held belief by the end of nineteenth century among many Americans was that the reason for rising problems in the country was rooted in industrialization and urbanization. For them it was important to impose a system of law and justice in a society which was at the very of chaos. This belief among the Americans was termed as progressivism. Though this phenomenon was diverse, which only began as a local movement, but it successfully brought innovation in society, both politically and socially.

The proponents of progressivism discussed the issues such as racism, role of women, how immigration will impact the society. The local efforts of progressives soon turned to be national, and as a result American presidency experienced change. 1917 was the time when America had joined World War I and the federal government also had drawn out its engagement within American life.

As the name suggests, the progressives were optimistic, they believed that the Americans were capable of progress, growth and advancement. This optimism they regarded to be nation’s fate. [[1]](#footnote-1)But for all this the progressive reformers thought laws such as of free market, or social Darwinism were not enough and for the amelioration of society human intervention is crucial. [[2]](#footnote-2)Since the progressives did not always agree on what form should the intervention take, so there were various reforms. “Antimonopoly” was one of the most robust social reform, which centres around the fear of concentration of power and impetus of limiting the wealth and authoritarian control.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Many progressive reformers stood for the social issues, which encompassed the elimination of alcohol, capping the divorce rate, hampering prostitution and impeding immigrants. [[4]](#footnote-4)To restore order in society it was important to cut down the consumption of alcohol among the Americans, because inebriety was a cause of disruption, the male workers spent their limited wages buying wine in the bars, there were murders.[[5]](#footnote-5) A hope rose among the female members that progressives through this reform of temperance will be able to dix the behaviour of male members which will lead to a better life.[[6]](#footnote-6) The consumption of alcohol by the workers was regarded to impede the efficiency of industrial units because the laborers used to forget times, or they were too much intoxicated to work properly.

Even before the Civil War, Temperance movement existed with the same mission but after 1873, it became more powerful and popular. [[7]](#footnote-7)With many people joining it, a demand was put forward on completely prohibiting the sale and production of alcohol. Pressure eventually grew, and it was in 1916 when nineteen states passed complete prohibition laws of alcohol. [[8]](#footnote-8)The final push to the lawyers of temperance movement was given when America entered World War I and alcohol was a beverage that was needless. Progressives with the support of rural fundamentalists, who were inimical to alcohol on the grounds of religion and social norms, drove through a constitutional amendment passed by the Congress.[[9]](#footnote-9) With the exception of two states Connecticut and Rhode Island, which had large population of catholic immigrants, in January 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment was enacted as law. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Despite the differences on how to respond to the challenge of immigrants, all the reformers were of similar view that the growing social ills are due to the influx of immigrants. [[11]](#footnote-11)Some reformers wanted to limit the flow of immigrants in the country while there were other who had the idea that new inhabitants must adopt the American ways. A common theory which circulated in the society was that these immigrants infect the nation’s racial stock. [[12]](#footnote-12)Under the chairmanship of Senator P. Dillingham of Vermont, a study revealed that the new immigrants which belonged to either or Southern or Eastern Europe were barely integrating.[[13]](#footnote-13) According to the report the immigration had to be restricted on racial grounds. Though there were people who rejected this idea of restriction but did support the idea that to solve the urban problems which included unemployment, overly crowded cities it was necessary to limit immigration. [[14]](#footnote-14)

The idea of limiting immigration won the support of America’s leading progressive reformer, Theodore Roosevelt, but there were opponents to this approach who believed that immigrants were important as they are a source of cheap labour and the political representatives of these opponents blocked the restriction movement. Eventually, World War I began, and the influx of new immigrants was limited. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Theodore Roosevelt, to progressives was not just a president but an idol, who became the youngest president of America in 1901, when he was only forty years old.[[16]](#footnote-16) Roosevelt, who associated himself with progressives, was an advocate of change and a reformist. According to him to safe America from radical challenges it was important to bring certain reforms. His policies were to investigate corporations and publicly declare the results. [[17]](#footnote-17)In 1904, presidency campaign, Roosevelt advertised “square deal”.[[18]](#footnote-18) After he won the election he emphasized his efforts on the railway industry. One previous effort for regulating railway industry was the 1887’s Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC).[[19]](#footnote-19) With the introduction of Hepburn Railroad Regulation Act in 1906, ICC was given some powers to oversee railroad rates, these powers had earlier been restricted by the courts.

Though Roosevelt introduced many reforms during his tenure as a president yet there was little control exervised over the industrialized economy. The differences between Conservatives and Roosevelt widened and the former blamed for introducing “mad” economic policies, which created a disaster. In 1909, Roosevelt retired from presidency and William Taft became the new president. [[20]](#footnote-20)

An old progressive demand was to lower the protective tariffs rate, and Taft was unsuccessful in doing that.[[21]](#footnote-21) Taft became unpopular when he replaced James R. Garfield, Roosevelt’s Secretary of interior, who was also a conservative with a corporate lawyer, A. Ballinger.[[22]](#footnote-22) Thus in 1912, after a lot mis happenings, a presidential content was held, between the reformers and conservatives, where Woodrow Wilson became the nominee of Democratic Party.[[23]](#footnote-23) In 1912, Taft resigned, and Wilson with his idea of “New Freedom”, won the election. Wilson brought reforms in the banking system of America, lowered protective tariff, modern income tax was imposed. [[24]](#footnote-24)

Woodrow Wilson brought many innovative ideas which increased the efficiency of government and thus he laid the foundation of long-term growth in federal power.[[25]](#footnote-25) He brought reforms for farmers, banned the delivery of goods by minors across the state, he also gave vast child labour laws, and federal tax authority was used an instrument for social change. Heavy taxes were imposed on child labour products and endowments were provided for extending agricultural education.[[26]](#footnote-26)

During the late 19th century the desire for reforms and in the beginning of the twentieth century, triggered American people to recognise themselves under the banner of “progressives”.[[27]](#footnote-27) For different people, this term had different meaning, but the foundation of this idea was that with the combined efforts of humans and government, a society could improve. Progressivism became robust, a force of transformation in the life of many Americans.

The urge to bring reform, which began as a local movement, reached federal level and national politics, soon affecting the government. It was believed that prosperity of the society was possible only if federal government actively participates in the process. Roosevelt and Wilson were two national leaders who pushed the nation forward in the period of reform, and a consequence since the Civil War, Washington became centre of power. Though progressivism couldn’t solve the problems in America, but it was successful in providing the country with movements, institutions, governments new instruments to face the challenges.

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